

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN,

AT

St. JAMES's

Feb. 14. 1703.

Being the

First Sunday in LENT

By the Right Reverend Father in GOD
James
WILLIAM Lord Bishop of Oxon.

Published by Her Majesties Special Command.

LONDON,

Printed by Tho. Warren for Thomas Bennet, at the
Half-Moon in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1703.

SERMON

1764-1769 - Francis Bland

ON THE

SABBATH

Feb. 1707

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By the Right Reverend Father in GOD
WILLIAM LLOYD Bishop of Glam.

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Deut. xxxii. 29.

O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.

THese words are a Pathetical wish of *Moses*, on the behalf of the People of *Israel*: I shall beg leave to apply them at present to our selves, not in our Political, but in our Personal Capacities; not as a Nation or Body of Men, but as particular Persons; Tho' if I can be so happy as to persuade any one so to consider his own latter end, as to be wise for himself, it must likewise make him wise for the Publick too.

The thing wished for in the Text is Wisdom, and the method of obtaining that Wisdom is Consideration, two very suitable Subjects for our Meditations at this Season, the most proper im-

ment on days of Fasting and Abstinence is this Consideration, and the great end which ought to be served by our retirements from the World, Fastings, Self-denials, and all other spiritual Exercises, is the obtaining that Wisdom.

In speaking to the words I shall endeavour to shew;

I. What it is for a Man to consider his latter end.

II. What wise practices would be the effects of such consideration.

1. What it is for a Man to consider his latter end.

By the latter end of a particular Person I understand the same that *Balaam* does in his wish, which is recorded by the Author of this Book in 23 of *Numb. v. 10. Let me, says he, die the Death of the Righteous, and let my last end be like his*, where it is plain by his last end he means the time of his Death, which *Solomon* in 7. of *Eccles. v. 2. calls the end of all men*. And so indeed it is, as to all the concerns of this life, and opportunities of providing for another: It puts an end to all the projects and designs, the labours and toils, the cares and anxieties of the Men of this World, for the obtaining or securing the good things of it, and to the satisfaction they take in the enjoying or beholding those they have gotten; for as the wise Man says of the dead, *Eccles. 9. 6. Their love i. e. of these things, and their hatred and envy, i. e. towards those that have been more successful in their pursuits after, and have a larger share of them, are now perished, neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the Sun.*

It

It puts an end to the work of good Men, to all the hardships and Difficulties they are exercised with here, to their Wars with their own Lusts, and their Conflicts with their spiritual Enemies, to their severe Mortifications and constant Watches, their *striving, and running, and pressing forward towards the Mark for the Prize*, so St. John assures them, Rev. 14. 13. — *The Dead that die in the Lord rest from their Labours*: It puts an end to all the Persecutions they suffer for their Faith and Religion from the Enemies of it, to all the unkind and injurious usage they meet with from Men; for in Death, as Job speaks 3. 17. *the Wicked cease from troubling, and the Weary are at rest*.

Finally, It puts an end to all that good or bad can do or suffer, which shall come into their future account: according to the Condition their work is in when Death calls them hence, will their Reward be when they come to Judgment; for every one is to be judged *according to what he has done in the Body*; 2 Cor. 5. 10. nothing to be done by, or for any in the intermediate State, *for there is no Work, nor Device, nor Knowledge, nor Wisdom in the Grave*, Eccles. 9. 10. *but if the Tree falls, c. 11. 3. towards the South, or towards the North, i. e. as several of the Fathers, and Estius and other Romish Commentators expound the place, if a Man dies in a State of Grace and Salvation, or if Sin and Damnation, in the place, i. e. the State, where it falleth, there it shall be*.

But tho' a Man's latter end be the Dissolution of the present Union of Soul and Body, and puts a final Period to all the Actions of this Life, yet is it the opening of a new Scene, the entrance upon another State; for tho' the Body moulders into Dust, yet

yet is it not annihilated, and the Spirit returns to God that gave it, who knows where all the Parts of Matter, whereof the Body consisted, are dispersed, and can and will at the last Day recollect them, and again join the same Body, tho' refin'd and spiritualiz'd, to the same Soul, to be together inconceivably and eternally happy, or wretched, according as the Man has behaved himself here.

And in the mean time, the Soul has a great share of Bliss or Misery, immediately upon the separation: The Scriptures represent the Soul, when separated from the Body, far enough from a State of Insensibility or Inactivity, (*Apoc. 6. 10. Luke 16.*) to Think is of the Essence of a rational Soul, which must therefore Think as long as it does exist. Death indeed is compared to a Sleep; but during their conjunction, while the Senses are shut up with Sleep, and the Body ceases from Action, the Soul can exert those Acts which are proper to her, can think, remember, infer, perceive Joy or Grief, yea many times things are represented in Dreams more lively and strongly, and so as to make more vigorous Impressions than the Mind could have received from them when the Man was waking. Why then should not the Soul in her separate State perform those Actions, in which she does not always depend upon the help of Corporeal Organs, and sometimes can operate more freely without them? Why may not the Soul look back upon its behaviour when it was in the Body, and forwards to that Eternal State to which it is now unalterably consign'd, and in which it must with the Body be forever rewarded or punished? Why should not this be the *rejoycing* of the Soul of a good Man.

even the testimony of his Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity he has had his conversation in the World, 2 Cor. 1. 12. that he has past safely through all the dangers, to which he was exposed while he was in it: And, is now out of all possibility of falling short of Heaven, that he has done the work, which God gave him to do, and has now nothing more to do, but to receive his wages, that he has finish'd his Course, fought the good Fight, kept the Faith, and there is a Crown of Glory ready for him, which God the righteous Judge shall give him at the last Day? 2 Tim. 4. 7-8.

On the other hand, why should not the Soul of a wicked Man look back with the severest Regret and Sorrow, upon the Sin it was guilty of in the Body, and forwards with the greatest Dread and Terror, at the endless Punishments that await him for them; he must reflect, My day of grace is past, the Season of Repentance, all possibility of being reconciled to my offended God, and escaping the insupportable Effects of his Just Wrath and Indignation over; nothing now remains, but a certain expectation of fiery Vengeance, which already begins to flash in upon me, and in which I must be tormented forever. These reflexions and prospects of separated Souls, are earnest of that full and perfect Joy or Misery, which will be their everlasting Portion, when they shall be re-united to their proper Bodies, and if there was nothing else from which they might be denominated Blessed or Wretched, by these alone they would in some measure antedate Heaven or Hell.

But what further Employments, and glorious Manifestations, Pious Souls may be capable of in Paradise

radise, in *Abraham's Bosom*, where the Scriptures represent them after their departure from the Body, or what further Anguish and Horror wicked Souls may feel in their Prisons, where they are reserv'd in Chains of Darknes, to the Judgment of the great Day, we cannot certainly tell; but this we may rest assur'd of, that both the one and the other shall be very Happy or Miserable, in such a way as is suitable to their Condition, while they are separated from their Bodies, and shall be compleatly and everlastingly so, when after the Resurrection they shall be united to them again. When the Virtuouse and Holy Soul shall with the utmost complacency, join that Body again, which had been devoutly offer'd in this Life, as a *living Sacrifice, Holy, acceptable to God*, and the *Members* thereof employ'd as *Servants to Righteousness unto Holiness*; that Body which had been brought under by Watching and Fasting, disciplin'd by denying its craving Appetites, and refusing to indulge and gratifie its Sences; that Body which was advanced as near as Matter could come to the nature of the Soul, and which being rais'd is now quite purg'd from its Dross, and made a spiritual and incorruptible Body, qualify'd for an indissoluble Union, with which she must forever continue in a State of perfect Happiness and Glory. When the vicious and sinful Soul shall with Horror and Amazement, greater than that with which she parted from it, meet again that Body which should have been the Temple of the Holy Ghost, but was miserably defil'd and defecrated, prostituted to all Riot and Sensuality, and the Members of it yielded Servants to uncleanness, and to Iniquity, unto Iniquity: that Body which

which had been the instrument of her Villanies, and must be sharer in her Punishment, which being raised, is indeed capable of an inseparable Union, and endless duration; but with which she must be for ever tormented in that place, *where the Worm dies not, and the Fire is not quenched.*

This, all this, is included in our *latter end*, which is a time when we shall leave this World, and enter upon a new and surprizing State, when our Souls and Bodies shall part, our Souls be happy or miserable, according to their Capacities in their separate Conditions, and Souls and Bodies after they are reunited perfectly and eternally so, as we have behaved our selves, and done well or ill here.

Before I proceed to shew what is imply'd in the word *consider*, it may not be amiss to form some Propositions concerning our *latter end*, which may be the objects of your consideration. As

1. That it is very certain, that such a time as this will once happen to every one of us: *It is appointed to Man, every Man, once to die, and after that the Judgment:* This I need not take pains to prove, to any that believe the Scriptures, or do but observe the daily Method of Providence, in the Government of the rational World.

2. That, though it be certain, that such a time will once come, 'tis not certain when it will come; by which I do not only mean, that we must consider of our *latter End* or Death, as very uncertain to us, (which every body will allow, there being nothing more common, than for Persons when they would declare their utter Ignorance of any thing, to say, I do no more know it, than I do the Day of my Death) but we must consider the *latter end*

of particular Persons, or the day of every ones Death, as not peremptorily determin'd and fixed by any absolute Decree of God. This I observe for this reason, because for a Man to consider his latter end, or the Day of his Death, as absolutely and unalterably decreed and set, would not be a means to make him Wise, which yet is the end that the consideration in my Text should conduce to: By Wisdom in Scripture, is generally meant Virtue and Piety, and the Fear of the Lord, which are the only true Wisdom. But now to consider my latter end, or time of my Death, as absolutely set, that I cannot die before, nor live after such a time, this will be so far from being a means to work Virtue and Piety in me, that it will very much obstruct, indeed quite defeat the success of other means appointed for that purpose: for instance,

The natural Tendency of some Vertues, or some Vices to prolong or shorten Life, must certainly be an effectual Method to prevail on some, those *that love long Life, and would fain see many Days,* to practice those Vertues, and avoid those Vices: while then, such are persuaded that Sobriety, Temperance and Chastity will contribute to the lengthening their Lives, and Luxury, Drunkenness, and Incontinence, to the hastening their Ends, this persuasion must be a forcible Motive with them to those excellent Vertues, and a strong preservative against those beastly Vices: but the efficacies of these Methods are quite destroy'd, by the belief of this proposition, that the time of every Man's Death is absolutely fix'd and determin'd, for if so, it is not the most constant and careful practice of those Vertues that can add one Hour to a Man's Life,

Life, nor can the loosest indulgence to those Vices, take one Hour from it.

Again, Besides the natural Tendency of Vertues and Vices, to protract Life, or hasten Death, there is a further Motive to the Practice of that, and avoiding of this, from those Promises and Threats of God, whereby he has engaged himself to lengthen the Days of Good Men, and cut short those of the Wicked.

Thus in the fifth Commandment, *Honour*, says he, *thy Father and thy Mother, that thy Days may be long in the Land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* So the Psalmist in 34 Ps. 12. *What Man is he that desireth Life, and loveth many Days, that he may see Good? Keep thy Tongue from Evil, and thy Lips that they speak no Guile, depart from Evil, and do Good, seek Peace and pursue it, &c.* and in Prov. 3. 16. *Wisdom, i. e. Piety and Holiness, is said to have length of Days in her right Hand; on the contrary, the workers of Iniquity are threatned Ps. 37. 2. to be cut down soon like the Grass, and to wither as the green Herb; and particularly of the Bloody and Deceitful Men, it is said, Ps. 55. 23. that they shall not live out half their Days.* 'Tis true indeed these Promises and Threats are not always literally fulfilled, but neither are other temporal Promises and Threats; for in all of them, however absolutely they may be expressed; God still reserves to himself a power of doing otherwise, if he shall see that more conducing to the good of his Servant, or the accomplishment of his wise Purposes: The best may be cut off in the midst of their Age, it may be they have been early and eminently Holy, and soon ripe for Glory; and the sooner God takes such to himself,

he is better, and not worse than his Promise; it may be he is resolved to punish a wicked People, and if the good, however young, are taken away from the Evil to come, that they may not see, nor be involved in the common Calamity, still this is kindness to them.

Wicked Men on the other hand, may sometimes be permitted to live to a great Age, if they are moderately so, to try possibly whether God's forbearance may at last lead them to Repentance; or, if they are very bad to be employ'd as God's Scourges to Mankind, and Instruments in the Execution of his Judgments upon them. Tho' for these or other just ends of his Providence, God does not always make good these Promises and Threats in kind, yet they hold as other Temporal Promises and Threats doe, and ought to be Motives to the performance of those Duties, and avoiding those Sins, to which they are respectively annexed.

But what Effects can they have upon Him that believes, that there is a fatal Period appointed, beyond which he shall not Live, and before which he shall not Die? How can such a one be prevail'd upon by God's Promises of long Life, to Honour his Parents, to keep his Tongue from Guile, to seek Peace and pursue it? or be deterr'd by his Threats of soon cutting him down, and taking him off before he comes to half his Days, from working Iniquity, from Blood-thirstiness and Deceitfulness? When he must believe, that notwithstanding he should incurr those Threats, he shall yet live out all his Days, all the Time appointed for him, and although he should intitle himself to those Promises, yet he shall not live one Day further.

Once

Once more, by the Sword of the Civil Magistrate, Capital Punishments are appointed as Fences to secure the Laws, to deter Men from great and enormous Crimes; and no more effectual Method can humane Wisdom devise, or Power execute to restrain Man from Murders, Thefts, and other such Violations of the Laws of Man and God too, than to make those that are guilty of them, pay their Lives for them. But alas, the Man that is satisfy'd, that the Period of his Life, or Hour of his Death, is absolutely set and determin'd, is arm'd against all Impressions, that the dread of these Punishments can make upon him; for what, tho' the Laws have made it Death to Rob on the high way, to break a House, to commit Murder or Treason; and what if I should be Guilty, and convicted of any of these Crimes? Why, if my time be not come, I shall not die for them, the Magistrates Sword shall not reach me; but if my time be come, I shall die, whether he execute me or not; and when the set time is come that I must die, what great matter is it, whether I die by a Beaver, or by a Halter, upon a Bed, or upon a Gibbet?

So many Methods to persuade Men to Virtue, and restrain them from Vice, are obstructed by the belief of this Position. But do not the Scriptures assert it? For does not Job say, in *ch. 7. 1.* *is there not an appointed time upon the Earth;* and *ch. 14. 14.* *all the Days of my appointed time will I wait,* &c. So indeed our Translators have rendered it: but what, they have Translated an *appointed time*, is in both places in the Hebrew, the vulgar Latin, and the Chaldee, *a Warfare*; and in one of them the Septuagint has rendered it *πρόσθεσις*, which signifies either

either a State of Temptation and Tryal, or of Danger from Pyrates and Robbers, so that all that these places import, is only this, that our time here, is a time of Hazard and Difficulty, of Conflicts and Encounters, with spiritual Enemies, and temporal Crosses and Afflictions; and what's all this to the proving a particular time set for every individual Man's Death?

But does not Job say at the 5th ver. of that Chap. *his Days are determin'd, the number of his Months are with thee, thou hast appointed his Bounds, that he cannot pass?* And does not this prove a fixt Period for every Man's Life? No surely, for Job is not here speaking of Individuals, but of Mankind: *His Days, His Months,* are the Days, the Months of Man, for he speaks in this of the same subject, that he did in ver. 1. viz. *Man that is born of a Woman,* i. e. Man in general, and then all that can be gather'd from hence is, that God has decreed a Term to humane Life, which no Man shall pass: But it does not from hence follow, that he has determin'd how much of the general Term every particular Person shall live; he has fixed a number of Years which no Man shall exceed, but surely, that notwithstanding he may extend or cut short the Years of particular Persons, within that general number: and this is all that Job affirms in this ver. that there are certain limits set to humane Life; he says indeed at the 1st ver. that these limits are but narrow, that the Days of Man are few, and this is the third Proposition I shall advance concerning our *latter End.*

3. That as it is certain, that such a time will once happen, to every one of us, but uncertain when,
so

so 'tis sure, that it cannot be long first; for *what is our Life?* the longest Life that any one arrives to? Has not the Scripture compared it to a *Vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away?* to the *Grass that groweth up in the Morning, and in the Evening is cut down and wither'd;* to the *Wind,* and many other things of the shortest continuance? Has it not bounded it within the compass of 70, or at most 80 Years? and if there are some very rare instances of those that go a little beyond that Term, how inconsiderable are they for number, in comparison of the many, many more that do not reach to the half of it? But we (my Brethren) have lived good part of our time, some more, some less already, and would we form a Just Judgment of that part, which may be yet to come; let us, I beseech you, do it from the Notions we have of that which we have already past; we have lived, it may be, 30, 40, 50, or more Years already: well, let us look back, what do we think of 'em? do they appear to us to have been a long time? no surely, if we would speak out, we should say, they seem but as Yesterday that is past; suppose then we should expect, (and really we must be very Sanguine to do it) to repeat that number, to live as many forwards, will the 30, 40, or 50, we hope yet to see, be longer than those we have already past? No, they will be as quickly over, and make but just the same inconsiderable Space; *so soon passeth away the longest Period of Life, and we are gone:* but how much short any of us may fall even of that Period, how much sooner our *latter End* may come, is known only to God: Scripture and Experience assure us, that

that it must come in few Years ; and we do not know, but it may come in few Days or Hours.

Thus I have shew'd what is included in our *latter End*, and resolved it into some Propositions, the sum of which is this. That we must all of us very soon, we know not how soon, leave this World, and enter upon another State, where we shall be immediately Happy, or Miserable, in a great degree, and at the Resurrection compleatly and everlastingly so, accordingly as we have conducted and demean'd our selves in this Life ; and this is to be the Object of our Consideration, which implies three things.

1st, an undoubting Assent to the Truth of it : for Propositions, however true in themselves, if they are not so to me, if I am an Infidel or Sceptick in them, if I disbelieve or doubt of them, can make no great Impressions upon me.

2^{ly}, A frequent reflecting upon it, and revolving it in my Mind ; for Propositions, which I have assented to, if I think not of them, are not like to have much more influence upon me, than those which I deny or question.

3^{ly}, And chiefly, a diligent application of it to the Government of my Life ; and the conducting it by such measures as that Belief and Reflexion will suggest ; for only such a practical consideration of his *latter end* will make a Man wise.

2^{ly}, How wise it will make him, what wise Practices will be the Effects of such consideration, I am to shew under my second General. And surely, 'twill be allow'd, that it will make him very Wise, if it makes him Wise for this World, and for the next too.

1. As

1. As to this World, that is certainly true Wisdom, which will carry a Man the most quietly through it, with the least Disturbance and Vexation: Now most of the Disturbances and Uneasinesses we meet with here, arise either from our own false Notions and imprudent pursuit of the good things of this World, or from those Evils which befall us by the Direction or Permission of Providence; and the Consideration of our *latter end*, will go a great way, towards the preventing or removing the former, and the alleviating, and supporting us under the latter.

To their false Notions of the good things of this World, are owing all that Torment and Vexation, which Men that want them feel in envying the Condition of others, and repining at their own: They think Riches and Honours, and Greatness and Power &c. to be necessary to Happiness, that he that has them must be a happy Man, which he cannot be that has them not; hence proceed their Fretting and Grieving, at the prosperous lot of their Neighbours, to whom they think Providence has been very partially favourable, and their Murmuring and Discontent at their own State, whom they account very miserable, and while they judge themselves so, certainly are so.

To their false Notions of these things, are owing the Disappointments those many times meet with that have them, they had form'd mighty Ideas of them, promised to themselves entire Satisfaction from them; but when they come to enjoy them, they find no such thing in them; 'tis impossible that things so disproportion'd to it, should ever fit, things so unsuitable, ever satisfy the Mind, which must be uneasy under the Deceit, and the

higher the Expectation had been raised, the greater must the disappointment be.

Now all this Disquiet which proceeds from Envy, Repining, and Disappointment, would be prevented by rectifying our Mistakes, and forming just Thoughts of these Things. Did we believe them to be, what indeed they are, false and unsatisfactory, mix'd and alloy'd, short and uncertain, unable to give us full content in our best Estate, or to afford us the least comfort when we shall most want it, we should not judge those Happy that had them, nor our selves Unhappy if we have them not, and consequently should neither Envy theirs, nor Repine at our own Lot; nor should we be disappointed if ever we should be possess'd of them, for how little Happiness soever the Enjoyment might give us, it would not be less than we expected.

And to the rectifying our false Notions, and giving us true ones of these Things, the due consideration of our *latter end* would very much contribute? Did we but daily represent to our selves the last Scene of Life, and consider what Thoughts we shall have of these Things then, it would make us more reasonable in our Apprehensions of them now. Fancy, my Brethren, (the Imagery may not be very entertaining to some, but it will be very instructive to all;) each of you fancy your selves upon your Death Beds, given over by your Physicians and Friends, Nature so far decay'd, or a malignant Distemper so far advanced, that you have no hopes of continuing many Hours, under the Weakness of one, or Violence of the other, but expect that this Night your Soul will be required of you; at this time you will behold these things in a true Light, and be able to make a Just Judgment.

ment of them; and how, I beseech you, do they appear to you? Are they indeed the desirable Things you once took them for? Will they afford you that intire Happiness, you promis'd your self from them? make tryal of them, will they give an agreeable Entertainment to your Thoughts? Can you reflect with pleasure upon your stately Houses, and rich Furniture, now you are just going to change them for a narrow Coffin and poor Shroud? upon your large Demeasnes, and vast Tracts of Land, when presently six foot of Earth will be the pittance you must be confin'd to? upon your honourable Posts and swelling Titles, when the Grave, in which you are lying down, knows no distinction of Qualities, but the Dust of the greatest Prince, is there undistinguishable from that of the meanest Beggar? Have you any Relish or Gust for the Luxury of your Tables, the Variety of your Dishes and Wines, when your own pamper'd Bodies are immediately to make a repast for the Worms? Will they do any real Service to your Body or Soul in this time of Extremity? Will they abate your Pains, or quiet your Conscience? Will they remove your Distemper, and rescue you from the Grave? Will they comfort your Soul in her separate State, or afford you any help in the Day of Judgment? Will they blind the Eyes of your Judge, or suborn the Evidence that is to come in against you? Can they purchase you a Pardon, or but a short Reprieve? No, no, so far from it, that if your Wealth and Riches have been abused to Luxury, Riot, and Sensuality, your Power and Greatness to Injustice Oppression and Violence, or any of the Temporal Enjoyments to be the Ministers of your Vices, they will make a severe Arti-

cle in your Indictment, and come in as Witnesses to prove it.

And is it thus, ye Flattering, Empty, Deceitful Vanities? Is there no Comfort or Assistance to be had from you? Can you neither ease my Body nor Mind? Can you neither keep me in this World, nor go with me into the next? Will you basely desert me in my greatest Distress? Leave me to the Torture of my Body, and the Wrack of my Conscience, to the Fury of my Disease, the Power of Death, and the Anger of my Judge, whom by your means I have provoked?

Wretched Cheats! What a Fool have I been to place my Affections upon you? Happy they who sit the loosest to you, and have the least to do with you, beyond what Necessity, Convenience, and the opportunity of doing good, require.

And will this be our Just Sense of these Things when we come to die? And is it certain that time is not far off? Why, surely, frequent Reflections upon this, must rectify our Mistakes about them at present above their Value, and teach us not to rate them above their Worth; and then we shall not be uneasie because others have them, or we have them not, nor disappointed if we are not very Happy when we have them.

Again, What Troubles and Vexations do those undergo, that are engaged in the eager pursuit of these things? That are for heaping Bag upon Bag, and adding Land to Land, that scarce ever arrive even to the Sense of the rich Fool in the Gospel, to know that they have enough, and say to their Soul, *Soul take thine ease*; but still drudge on in their laborious quest after more?

How do they wrack their Thoughts, and break their

their sleep, in laying designs? Wear out their Days and Bodies too in executing them? How anxiously solicitous are they for the Success of their Projects and Labours? How very unhappy if it does not answer their Expectations? And how far from Happy if it does? Neither Disappointment nor Success puts an end to their Toil, but either affords an Argument to persuade them to go on.

But would these Persons consider their *latter end*, how near the time is that would put a full stop to their pursuit after these things, and Enjoyment of them too, 'twould certainly make them turn short, allow themselves some time to enjoy the Fruit of their Labours, and not foolishly waste away a whole Life, only in making Provision for Life: Did they reflect what it is they take such Pains to provide for, a Bubble, a Shadow, a Flower of a Day; 'twould surely shew them the Folly of making such lasting Provisions for a thing of so short a duration; 'twould teach them the Wisdom to proportion their Cares and Endeavours for the things of this World, to the time they are like to continue in it; and not to labour and lay up for Ages, when only a few Days, are more than they can call their own.

Then for the Evils that befall us here, whether in our Persons or Estates, our good Names, our Friends and Relations, which way soever they affect us, still this consideration affords some Relief; be they privative or positive Afflictions, as occasion'd by the loss of something we valued and loved, or by our enduring something very Painful or Grievous to us.

The consideration of our *latter end* will teach us, that we could not possibly have been much longer Happy.

Happy in the former, nor can be much longer uneasy under the latter: The greatest support to a Man in Misery, is to be able to look to one end of it, and the nearer prospect he has of that, the better able is he to bear it: Now all the Miseries of this Life can last no longer than Life; they must cease at our *latter end*; since then our Lives are short, our Miseries cannot last long, since our *latter end* is near, our deliverance cannot be far off; and these Reflections must lessen our Sufferings here, and give us some support under them.

2. But the greatest Advantage of the consideration of our *latter end* is, that it makes us wise for the other World. We have seen that by our *latter end* is meant, not only a time when we must die and leave this World, (if that were all, if there were no Life in another World, the only Wisdom the consideration of that could teach us, would be to make the most of this;) but when we must enter upon another Life and State which will have no end, the Joys or Sufferings whereof, will exceed those of this present Life, as much in Degree as in Duration; and surely if we heartily assent to, and seriously think upon these Premises, we must make this conclusion from them, that it is our Wisdom to provide for this future State, tho' it were at never so great a distance of time from us; if we must once enter upon it, and thence be for ever Happy or Miserable in it, a thinking Man must judge all his time here, most wisely imploy'd in preparing for it, though he should live as many Ages, as the most Sanguine Man promises himself Days.

But since it is certain, not only that this time must once happen to every one of us, but also that it

it must happen very soon, we know not how soon, the consideration thereof will teach us these particular points of Wisdom.

1. To be frugal of our time, and husband it to the best advantage: This short Day is all the season of working, when the Night comes no one can work. And is my time here at best very short? Have I a great work to do in that short time? Does my Eternal Bliss or Woe depend upon my finishing that Work? And can I be so foolish to squander away this time in Idleness or Riot, in vain Recreations, and loose Conversation? Shall I suffer Sleep, and Pleasure, and Sin, to share it among them? There are such Fools in the World, whose time seems to lye upon their Hands, and they are mightily put to it, to contrive how they may pass it away: 'Tis certain these Persons never consider their *latter end* at all, or at least not as they should do. For did they heartily believe, and seriously reflect, that their Life here is only a time of Probation and Preparation for an endless life hereafter, that this time is very short, and extremely uncertain, they would surely be so wise, as not only to cut off all those foolish Expences of their precious Time in Idleness, Folly, Company, and Pleasures: But they would retrench from their Worldly Business, and even from their necessary Sleep, and think all little enough to do their great Work in.

2. This should teach us not to defer our Repentance; there are too many who being convinced of the necessity of Repenting in order to be saved, resolve to do it sometime, but still put it off for the present, and flatter themselves with the hopes of Opportunities of doing it hereafter: But did these
Persons

Persons consider their *latter end*, they would see what a desperate Hazard they run; in trusting their Eternal Condition to so weak and uncertain a thing as a puff of Air, the Breath that is in their Nostrils, which must of it self go away in a little time, and is lyable to be stopped by thousands of Accidents every Hour.

Except I repent, I am sure to *perish*, I have no time to repent in but this Life, this Life cannot last many Years, and I know not whether it may last one Day: Shall I then be so mad, as to put off my Repentance one Day; to venture it and my Soul with it upon continuance of that, which this very Night, which the next Moment, may put an end to? Certainly I must be very stupid, if these Reflections do not teach me this wise Lesson, to set about it immediately, to begin this Day carefully and impartially to search my Heart, and examine my ways, sorrowfully to acknowledge my Sins before God, humbly to implore his Pardon and forgiveness of them, through the Merits of Christ, to form strong Resolutions against them for the future, to beg the assistance of God's Grace, and in the strength of that to watch and strive, and fight against them, 'till I am, thro' him that loves me, *More than Conqueror over them*.

3. This consideration of our *latter end*, would teach us this Wisdom for the other World, to make use of all the means of Grace that are offer'd us, and not neglect one Opportunity that is put into our Hands of waiting upon God in his Holy Ordinances, or of doing good to our Neighbour according to our Power.

He has appointed these Ordinances, as the means of our Growth in Grace, and spiritual Improvement,

ment, as the Food of our Souls, whereby they are to be nourished to Eternal Life; and by doing good, being Rich in good Works, ready to Distribute, willing to Communicate, we lay up in store for our selves good Foundations against the time to come, that we may lay hold upon that Life. Whenever then the returns of the Seasons for God's Publick Worship, for Praying to him in the great Congregation, for hearing his Word, for receiving of the Blessed Sacrament, call upon me to attend upon those Duties; or when a happy occasion is offer'd me (and I have Abilities to do it) of ministring to the Temporal or Spiritual Necessities of a poor Brother, as often as any Opportunity is afforded, whereby I may promote the Glory of God, or contribute to the good of Man, the consideration of my *latter end* will teach me to lay hold on it, and not omit one, because my time being so short and uncertain, I do not know whether ever I may have another.

4. Lastly, This Consideration will teach me to go on with the Work and Service of God, and persevere to the end with Alacrity; for it shews me these two Things.

1. That my Service can be but short. And

2. That I shall quickly receive my Wages.

My *latter end* I am sure cannot be far off, but may be much nearer than I expect it, which will both put an end to my Work, and give me Possession of my Reward: Does the short Day of Life then shut up my Labour, and am I sure of my Penny in the Evening, is my Race but as it were a Span, and is there a Crown of Glory ready for me at the Goal? Surely the shortness of the Stage will not suffer me to faint or grow weary, but the nearness of the Prize will animate and encourage me to press forward to the mark, with Cheerfulness and Joy.

But these are Thoughts that do not sit very easie upon many of us, and we think our selves very wise in removing them far from us: Some love this Life, and others fear the next; The former have placed all their Happiness in this World,

and cannot endure to think of leaving it; this is their Heaven, and they will not cast so much alloy into the Joys of it, as to reflect they must soon have an end.

The latter have such a dreadful account to make in the other, that it seems to them a forestalling of Hell, to give way to the Thoughts of a Day of reckoning, and therefore if ever they press upon them, they treat them as *Felix* did St. Paul, when he had *reasoned of Judgment to come*; *Go your way for this time, and when I have a convenient season, I will send for you.*

This is such unaccountable Folly, that had we not daily Experience of it, we should hardly think it possible for reasonable Creatures to be guilty of it; for of those that love this Life no one can be so Ignorant, as not to know, that his *latter end* is hastening towards him; or rather he is hastening towards it, whether he consider it or not; that however he put away the thoughts of it, he cannot put off the Evil Day, which if it finds him unprepared, as it must do if he thinks not of it, will be an Evil Day indeed: Nay, he must know, that he cannot with all his Art, secure himself entirely against the return of those uneasy Thoughts, upon every shock of his own Body and Health, and Sickness or Death of a Friend, every instance of another's Mortality, must put him in Mind of his own: Whereas on the other hand, he that considers his *latter end*, takes the most likely course to prolong his Life: Those Virtues and Duties, which such consideration will engage him to practice, are very apt, both by their natural Tendency, and by virtue of the Divine Promise, to increase the number of his Days; but however that may be, they will, I'm sure, make him live longer than those that may see more Days. For is the life of a Man to be measured by the Clock or Dial, or the Revolutions of Seasons? St. Paul speaking of some, the Widdows that live in Pleasure, says they are dead while they live; and most certainly all those that are given up to Voluptuousness and Sensuality, that are neither serviceable to God, nor useful in their Generation,

tion, are dead to all rational Life, they may live the Life of Brute, but not that of a Man; that Man only truly lives, who answers the ends for which the Author of it gave him his Life; that employs it in the glorifying his Maker, helping his Brother, and improving his own Mind; and such will be the Employment of his Life, who duly considers his *latter end*, and he that so employs his Life, will never be uneasy at the Apprehensions of Death, and how quickly soever that comes, will have lived a great while, and to good Purpose.

Again, how ridiculously Senseless is it, for a Man to avoid the consideration of his *latter end*, because he is afraid of a Judgment after Death? Whereas those very Fears should engage him in this Consideration, as being the only Method he can use to relieve himself from them: He believes this Judgment, otherwise he could not be afraid of it; and he is afraid of it, because he is not prepared for it: And should not the natural consequence of this Belief and Fear be, that therefore he should speedily set about preparing for it, rather than endeavour to suppress all thoughts of it? Which when he has done all he can, he will not be able quite to stifle; for Conscience will not always be beaten off by the Succession of his Companies and Diversions, the Noise of his Riots, and the Fumes of his Wines; she always dogs him, and will sometime find him alone and cool, and will then be heard, and make him sufficiently uneasy, especially if at any time the Hand of God be upon him, and he begins to set his Sins in array before him.

But could he secure himself all his Life from the uneasiness of that very troublesome Companion, that not one disquieting Thought of the dreadful Judgment Day should ever get Admittance, yet let him assure himself, that however he dreams not of it, that *Judgment slumbers not, the Day is appointed, and the Judge ordained*, who has told us what will be the doom of that *Evil Servant*, that thinks his Lord delays his coming, and therefore quarrels with his Fellow Servants, and Eats and Drinks with the Drunken,

viz.

viz. that his Lord will come in an Hour when he thinks not of it, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his Portion with Hypocrites, where shall be Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth.

And if it be so grievous to him to think of that Punishment here, what must it be to feel it forever? And what a madness is it, for him, by industriously avoiding the consideration, most certainly to intitle himself to the dreadful Execution of it.

Whereas due consideration of it, and careful pursuit of those wise Methods, which such consideration would suggest, would secure him not only from being miserable in it hereafter, but from being uneasie in thinking upon it here; the thoughts of that Judgment are uneasie to him, because he has so much Guilt upon him, that he is sure to be condemn'd, the Day of account terrible, because he is vastly in debt, and altogether insolvent: But the Just Consideration of it, would engage him in such a course, as would intitle him to a pardon; and put him upon such a careful inspection into, and wise Management of his Accounts, and that the vast Summ for which he cannot answer himself, shall be charged upon his All-sufficient Surety: And then how can the Thoughts of a future Judgment and Reckoning be terrible to him who has his Pardon ready to plead, and his Accounts fairly stated?

In short, all the Terrors Men feel at their Apprehensions of Death and Judgment, are owing not to the consideration of their *latter end*, but to the want of that Consideration, and are so far from being reasonable Objections to hinder them from it, that they are strong Motives to persuade them to it.

Thus I have dispatched the two things I propos'd, have shewn what it is to consider our *latter end*, and what wise Practices would be the Effects of such Consideration; I shall conclude with making that my hearty wish for you, which was Moses's for the Israelites. *O that you were Wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter End.*

F I N I S.